

Evidence Synthesis Infrastructure Collaborative (ESIC) planning process: Interim Report

Working group 4:
Methods & Process Innovation

Stage 4b report:
Solutions and costing

Last updated:
5 June 2025

Consultation window:
6 – 11 June 2025

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In this report we present the cost estimates for operationalization of the 11 prioritized solutions identified in report 4a. These solutions aim to enhance evidence synthesis methods and processes. The total cost of the proposed solutions is **US\$ 42,210,240**. The cost estimates for each solution are as follows:

- Solution 1: Pilot Evidence Response Teams - **\$3,074,959**
- Solution 2: Harmonization of Quality Standards - **\$1,058,139**
- Solution 3 – Incentivizing cross-sectoral collaboration - **\$994,606**
- Solution 4 – Database of ongoing LES - **\$5,062,112**
- Solution 5 – Establish a global panel of citizen partners - **\$7,770,830**
- Solution 6 – Methodological innovation in the use of grey literature - **\$3,908,239**
- Solution 7 – Methodological innovation in assessing certainty of evidence - **\$1,703,265**
- Solution 8 – Tools to support a layered approach to disseminating evidence - **\$1,445,123**
- Solution 9 – Co-produced methods toolkit for agile evidence synthesis to support dialogue between evidence producers and policymakers and commissioners - **\$5,558,191**
- Solution 10 - Methodological innovation and tools for translating findings from LES to local contexts - **\$7,798,931**
- Solution 11 - Strengthen and build infrastructures that support methodological rigour - **\$3,835,845**

The report provides cost breakdown details for each solution in accompanying tables.

The report also provides a value assessment to determine the potential impact of these solutions on the evidence synthesis landscape. WG4 members rated each solution's potential impact on strengthening evidence synthesis methods using a scale from 1 to 10. Solutions with higher average scores were deemed of greater value. Based on the value assessment, the top three solutions for investment are

- **Solution 10:** Methodological innovation and tools for translating findings from LES to local contexts
- **Solution 4:** Database of ongoing LES
- **Solution 9:** Co-produced methods toolkit for agile evidence synthesis to support dialogue between evidence producers and policymakers and commissioners.



INTRODUCTION

In report 4a, we identified 11 priority solutions to enhance the quality and efficiency of evidence synthesis methods and processes. This stage 4b report focuses on costing these solutions and performing a light-touch value assessment. The following steps were used to generate the cost estimates.

1. Inputs for successful implementation of the solution were identified by the WG4 members. These were broadly categorised into human resources, subcontracts to external parties, tools, training events attendance for capacity enhancement of the staff implementing the solution, citizen engagement costs, travel costs, dissemination and any other costs that do not fit into the listed categories. This information was provided to costing consultants, who then estimated the cost.
2. The inputs were costed with special considerations to the regional unit cost differences for human resources.
3. A 20% overheads costs was added to compute the overall cost for each solution.

To assess the value of potential investment in these solutions, WG4 members rated the impact/value of each solution in relation to its potential to contribute to strengthening the evidence synthesis methods landscape, using a scale of 1 (very low value; minimal contribution to) to 10 (very high value; strong and transformative contribution to advancing the methods landscape). Solutions with the highest average scores were considered to offer the greatest value. The value assessment focused exclusively on these value scores, with the rationale being that solutions with the highest perceived impact would contribute most significantly to strengthening evidence synthesis efforts.

PRIORITISED SOLUTIONS

The 11 prioritized solutions are listed in Figure 1, and mapped to the [‘SHOW ME’](#) the evidence principles, which are key to achieving the desired ESIC transformation.

Figure 1: Prioritized solutions recommended for inclusion in the menu of options for funder investment, aligned to the SHOW ME the evidence features.

Solutions		S	H	O	W	M	E
		Support systems locally that use many forms of research to help address local priorities	Harmonized efforts globally that make it easier to learn from others around the world.	Open-science approaches that make it the norm to build on what others have done	Waste-reduction efforts that make the most of investments in evidence support and in research	Measured communications that clarify what we know from existing evidence and with what caveats	Equity and efficiency in all aspects of this work
1	“Evidence Response Teams” trained in agile methods and embedded in key institutions	✓	✓				✓
2	Harmonise minimum quality standards for different types of synthesis		✓	✓			
3	Incentivize and enhance cross-sectoral collaboration		✓				✓
4	Database of ongoing LES		✓	✓	✓		
5	Global panel of citizen partners		✓				✓
6	Methodological innovation in use of 'grey literature'	✓			✓		✓
7	Methodological innovation in assessing certainty of evidence	✓	✓			✓	

8	Develop tools for layered approach to evidence dissemination					✓	✓
9	Co-produced toolkit to support dialogue between evidence producers and policy-makers and commissioners	✓	✓				
10	Methodological innovation and tools for translating findings from LES to local contexts	✓					✓
11	Strengthen and build those infrastructures that support methodological rigour		✓				

COST OF SOLUTIONS

The total cost of the solutions proposed by WG4 is **US\$ 42,210,240**. The cost of the solution bundle is shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Overview of costs for prioritized solutions

Solution No. and Name	Total costs US\$	% of Group Total
1. Pilot Evidence Response Teams: These teams, trained in agile methods, will be embedded in key institutions to deliver rapid syntheses and respond to urgent requests	\$3,074,959	7%
2. Harmonization of Quality Standards: Establishing a unified framework for quality standards across various sectors to ensure consistency in evidence synthesis	\$1,058,139	3%
3. Incentivizing Cross-Sectoral Learning and Collaboration: Promoting joint funding calls for evidence synthesis projects that require collaboration among various sectors, and establishing cross-sectoral communities of practices	\$994,606	2%
4. Establish a system/database to monitor ongoing LSRs to avoid duplication of effort.	\$5,062,112	12%
5. Establish a global panel of citizen partners, with regional /sub-regional representation. The panel will operationalize the ESIC “Call to Action: Putting evidence at the center of everyday life of citizens” and strengthen the relationship between citizens and research to facilitate participation in the different phases of synthesis production	\$7,770,830	18%
6. Support the integration of grey literature into evidence synthesis including through a package of work including: (1) Develop guidance and recommendations on the types and appropriate use of grey literature for different review questions and contexts. (2) Maintained repositories of relevant grey literature sources. (3) Identify and categorise types of grey literature, using those most appropriate for the review’s purpose – (Taxonomy- policy documents, clinical guidance, regulatory data, NGO reports, conference abstracts, institutional repositories, formal/informal, institutional/non-institutional). (4) Clear guidance on how to report the use of grey literature. (5) Data in searchable formats – currently, locating relevant information in lengthy government reports can be burdensome, especially when their relevance is uncertain. (6) Reporting standards for the use of grey literature, including source identification and methods of data extraction (which sources, why and how); 7) Encourage those who produce/commission reports (grey literature reports) to display an open access license to continue on-line presence of reports (so pdf isn’t lost) and appropriate.	\$3,908,239	9%
7. Develop and disseminate tools to better assess certainty of the evidence for observational studies, qualitative evidence, and mixed methods studies building on current frameworks to address its inherent subjectivity and diversity.	\$1,703,265	4%



Solution No. and Name	Total costs US\$	% of Group Total
8. Develop/improve tools that support a layered approach to disseminating evidence.	\$1,445,123	3%
9. Collate, curate and standardise methods to support the appropriate use of evidence synthesis to address policymakers' needs, through closer working between policymakers and evidence producers and the development of a modular agile synthesis toolkit. This would comprise an interactive menu of methodological approaches to support the timely and context-specific use of agile evidence synthesis, tailored to different types of questions, levels of urgency, and available resources (i.e. tiered models tailored to different urgency levels and decision-making contexts). It would also include guidance for rapid and living reviews, policy briefs, and evidence summaries tailored to time-sensitive contexts.	\$5,558,191	13%
10. Methods and tools for translating findings of LES to local contexts and disseminating findings from LES to support evidence use in policy making. approaches include standardization of approaches to contextualization, developing supports/ data/ models/ frameworks to support. Developing Guidelines for plain language summaries for LES. to ensure contextualization can be done, it is important to foreground gender and inclusion in LES methods. This means being sensitive to gender and inclusion in the team composition, the sources of evidence and the data extracted from the evidence.	\$7,798,931	18%
11. Strengthen existing structures and methods in place to support evidence synthesis through an Academy for Evidence Synthesis, which can become a central hub for building capacity globally. And maintaining funding to key organisations that contribute to foundations of quality and rigour for evidence synthesis.	\$3,835,845	9%
Total	\$42,210,240	100%

In Tables 2 - 12, we show the breakdown of the cost estimates for each solution. All figures are in US\$:

Table 2. Costing of solution 1 – piloting evidence response teams

Category	Direct Costs by category	% of total direct costs
People	\$2,128,016	83.05%
Contracts	\$3,250	0.13%
Tools	\$56,400	2.20%
Training event attendance	\$154,000	6.01%
Citizen engagement	\$22,800	0.89%
Travel	\$117,000	4.57%
Dissemination	\$81,000	3.16%
Other	\$0	0.00%
Total direct costs	\$2,562,466	100.00%

Grand total with 20% overheads	\$3,074,959	
--------------------------------	--------------------	--

Table 3. Costing of solution 2 – Harmonization of quality standards

Category	Direct Costs by category	% of total direct costs
People	\$422,942	47.96%
Contracts	\$0	0.00%
Tools	\$328,050	37.20%
Training event attendance	\$69,300	7.86%
Citizen engagement	\$6,840	0.78%
Travel	\$52,650	5.97%
Dissemination	\$2,000	0.23%
Other	\$0	0.00%
Total direct costs	\$881,782	100.00%
Grand total with 20% overheads	\$1,058,139	

Table 4. Costing of solution 3 – Incentivizing cross-sectoral collaboration

Category	Direct Costs by category	% of total direct costs
People	\$603,235	72.78%
Contracts	\$0	0.00%
Tools	\$10,953	1.32%
Training event attendance	\$115,500	13.94%
Citizen engagement	\$11,400	1.38%
Travel	\$87,750	10.59%
Dissemination	\$0	0.00%
Other	\$0	0.00%
Total direct costs	\$828,838	100.00%
Grand total with 20% overheads	\$994,606	

Table 5. Costing of solution 4 – Database of ongoing LES

Category	Direct Costs by category	% of total direct costs
People	\$3,817,887	90.50%
Contracts	\$0	0.00%
Tools	\$224,540	5.32%
Training event attendance	\$29,500	0.70%
Citizen engagement	\$0	0.00%
Travel	\$97,500	2.31%
Dissemination	\$49,000	1.16%

Other	\$0	0.00%
Total direct costs	\$4,218,427	100.00%
Grand total with 20% overheads	\$5,062,112	

Table 6. Costing of solution 5 – Establish a global panel of citizen partners

Category	Direct Costs by category	% of total direct costs
People	\$5,211,160	80.47%
Contracts	\$0	0.00%
Tools	\$227,100	3.51%
Training event attendance	\$272,000	4.20%
Citizen engagement	\$155,232	2.40%
Travel	\$585,000	9.03%
Dissemination	\$25,200	0.39%
Other	\$0	0.00%
Total direct costs	\$6,475,692	100.00%

Table 7. Costing of solution 6 – Methodological innovation in the use of grey literature

Category	Direct Costs by category	% of total direct costs
People	\$3,024,515	92.87%
Contracts	\$0	0.00%
Tools	\$105,750	3.25%
Training event attendance	\$30,800	0.95%
Citizen engagement	\$22,800	0.70%
Travel	\$55,500	1.70%
Dissemination	\$17,500	0.54%
Other	\$0	0.00%
Total direct costs	\$3,256,865	100.00%
Grand total with 20% overheads	\$3,908,239	

Table 8. Costing of solution 7 – Methodological innovation in assessing certainty of evidence

Category	Direct Costs by category	% of total direct costs
People	\$1,169,048	82.36%
Contracts	\$0	0.00%
Tools	\$35,700	2.52%
Training event attendance	\$165,500	11.66%
Citizen engagement	\$18,240	1.29%
Travel	\$16,500	1.16%

Dissemination	\$14,400	1.01%
Other	\$0	0.00%
Total direct costs	\$1,419,388	100.00%
Grand total with 20% overheads	\$1,703,265	

Table 9. Costing of solution 8 – Tools to support a layered approach to disseminating evidence

Category	Direct Costs by category	% of total direct costs
People	\$924,120	76.74%
Contracts	\$0	0.00%
Tools	\$127,400	10.58%
Training event attendance	\$69,300	5.75%
Citizen engagement	\$5,700	0.47%
Travel	\$35,100	2.91%
Dissemination	\$19,650	1.63%
Other	\$23,000	1.91%
Total direct costs	\$1,204,270	100.00%
Grand total with 20% overheads	\$1,445,123	

Table 10. Costing of solution 9 – Co-produced methods toolkit for agile evidence synthesis to support dialogue between evidence producers and policymakers and commissioners

Category	Direct Costs by category	% of total direct costs
People	\$4,320,026	93.27%
Contracts	\$0	0.00%
Tools	\$151,450	3.27%
Training event attendance	\$23,100	0.50%
Citizen engagement	\$85,500	1.85%
Travel	\$29,250	0.63%
Dissemination	\$22,500	0.49%
Other	\$0	0.00%
Total direct costs	\$4,631,826	100.00%
Grand total with 20% overheads	\$5,558,191	

Table 11. Costing of solution 10 - Methodological innovation and tools for translating findings from LES to local contexts

Category	Direct Costs by category	% of total direct costs
People	\$5,993,509	92.22%
Contracts	\$110,000	1.69%

Tools	\$74,750	1.15%
Training event attendance	\$105,000	1.62%
Citizen engagement	\$171,000	2.63%
Travel	\$19,250	0.30%
Dissemination	\$25,600	0.39%
Other	\$0	0.00%
Total direct costs	\$6,499,109	100.00%
Grand total with 20% overheads	\$7,798,931	

Table 12. Costing for solution 11 - Strengthen and build infrastructures that support methodological rigour

Category	Direct Costs by category	% of total direct costs
People	\$2,784,492	87.11%
Contracts	\$0	0.00%
Tools	\$172,985	5.41%
Training event attendance	\$210,000	6.57%
Citizen engagement	\$0	0.00%
Travel	\$19,250	0.60%
Dissemination	\$9,810	0.31%
Other	\$0	0.00%
Total direct costs	\$3,196,537	100.00%
Grand total with 20% overheads	\$3,835,845	

VALUE ASSESSMENT

Table 13 presents the results of the value scores. Based on these results, the top three ranked solutions are:

- **Solution 10:** Methodological innovation and tools for translating findings from LES to local contexts
- **Solution 4:** Database of ongoing LES
- **Solution 9:** Co-produced methods toolkit for agile evidence synthesis to support dialogue between evidence producers and policymakers and commissioners.

Investment in these three solutions would significantly impact the evidence synthesis ecosystem.

Table 13: Results of value assessment

Rank	Solution	Cost	Value Score
1	10 - Methodological innovation and tools for translating findings from LES to local contexts	\$5,889,538	9.25

2	4 - Database of ongoing LES	\$3,861,874	9
3	9 - Co-produced tool-kit to support dialogue between evidence producers and policy-makers and commissioners	\$4,203,759	8.5
4	2 - Harmonise minimum quality standards for different types of synthesis	\$1,387,900	8
5	8 - Develop tools for layered approach to evidence dissemination	\$1,141,595	8
6	11 - Strengthen and build those infrastructures that support methodological rigour	\$3,027,831	7.75
7	3 - Incentivize cross-sectoral partnerships	\$744,164	7.625
8	6 - Methodological innovation in use of 'grey literature'	\$2,972,892	7.125
9	7 - Methodological innovation in assessing certainty of evidence	\$1,102,368	6.571
10	5 - Global panel of citizen partners	\$5,964,158	6.125
11	1 - Pilot "Evidence Response Teams" trained in agile methods and embedded in key institutions	\$ 2,687,557	5.75

CAPABILITY SOLUTION MATRIX

The proposed solutions outlined in this report align with the nine prioritised capabilities necessary to achieve the vision of the group, which is to develop innovative synthesis methods and processes that produce timely, relevant, and cost-efficient syntheses, identified in Stage 2 of the ESIC process. The table below maps each solution to those capabilities, recognising that many solutions contribute to multiple areas and therefore cut across several capability domains. At Stage 2, all nine capabilities were assessed at a maturity score of 2 out of 5. We anticipate that implementing the proposed solutions will significantly strengthen these capabilities, advancing their maturity to a score of 4 or higher.

Identified capability from stage 2	4.1	4.2	4.3	4.4	4.5	4.6	4.7	4.8	4.9	4.10	4.11
LES addressing large-scale policy questions related to priority global social challenges such as SDGs through consideration of multiple types of evidence and particularly mixed-methods LES		✓	✓			✓			✓		
Global repository for protocols and LES to avoid duplication of effort without stifling innovation				✓							

Global and equitable access to all relevant data to include in an LES (primary research, process and impact evaluations, grey literature, and local administrative data (i.e. data not behind paywalls, available in open and well indexed databases)						✓					
Systems and platforms that allow access to, and re-use of, extracted data, quality assessments, etc., to avoid duplication of effort and better efficiency, building on already existing data						✓	✓				
Shared methods and processes for synthesizing different types of data (qualitative, program evaluations, administrative data) to inform different types of questions, including criteria for updates, to ensure methodological quality		✓				✓		✓		✓	
Shared methods for reporting LES, including methods to assess certainty in the evidence, capturing results for search updates, and for plain language summaries							✓	✓	✓	✓	
Systems for quality assurance and trust of LES products, i.e. ongoing methods/editorial support		✓									
Adequate and equitable availability and funding for skilled human resources/teams to conduct LES globally	✓										✓
Adaptation of methods developed for health and social sciences to other sectors (e.g. climate) in a way that fosters cross-sector innovation in evidence production			✓		✓					✓	